

COMPARATIVE BIOLOGY AND EVOLUTION OF TITMICE

THE CENTENNIAL SYMPOSIUM OF THE WILSON ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

This volume of *The Wilson Bulletin* is devoted to papers on the evolution and comparative biology of titmice, including the invited papers of the Centennial Meeting. Their appearance here continues a long *Wilson Bulletin* tradition of seminal papers on the biology of chickadees and titmice.

Chickadees and titmice (*Parus*) are among the most popular birds for ornithological study. The extensive literature on these small passerine birds, however, does not mean that research opportunities are nearly exhausted. Quite the opposite. The rapidly growing body of knowledge of their behavior and ecology makes chickadees and titmice excellent subjects for both descriptive and experimental studies in the field and in the laboratory. Parids are ideal for comparative studies, the basis for insights concerning many evolutionary problems. Increasingly, also, we are entering an era of synthesis in which knowledge of parid social behavior, communication, morphology, physiology, foraging behavior, reproductive biology, population ecology, community ecology, and systematics blends into an integrated understanding of adaptations and evolution of whole organisms. No other set of birds is known so intimately and so coherently as are the titmice. This taxonomic group provides ideal "model species" for investigating important questions concerning many aspects of avian biology. For example, few other groups have been the subject of such extensive long-term studies of local populations as those conducted by workers on several European species. For another example, as the result of field and laboratory studies, parids now feature in biological research concerning the nature of memory and its relationship to brain structure.

The Centennial Meeting of the Wilson Ornithological Society at the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia on June 9, 1988 provided an opportunity to further research on *Parus*. This is a large avian genus (about 43 species), with a distribution spanning four continents. By organizing an international symposium devoted to the comparative biology of titmice, we hoped both to increase communication among experts from North America and Europe and to launch a new era of cooperation, stimulation, and, especially, synthesis. To this end, we invited seven plenary speakers—André Dhondt from Belgium, Jan Ekman from Sweden, Svein Haftorn and Olav Hogstad from Norway, Jack Hailman from

the U.S., Christopher Perrins from England, and David Sherry from Canada—renowned leaders in the study of titmice. Each plenary speaker addressed a topic of his choice, reviewing recent advances, and setting the stage for further research. As important as the plenary talks, however, were the informal discussions and workshops that ensued that week in Philadelphia. It was an exciting event that clearly launched the next decades of parid research.

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Editor's note: Frank Gill organized and conducted the symposium. Frank and Millicent S. Ficken gathered the authors' manuscripts, read and edited them, and negotiated revisions, deletions, and corrections. We express our gratitude to Millicent and Frank for producing a synthesis that will be a valuable source for students of the biology of *Parus*.—C. R. BLEM.